

Message Text

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41

ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3438

INFO AMCONSUL MEDAN

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SUBJ: MINISTER SUMARLIN STRIKES A BLOW FOR CLEAN GOVERNMENT

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. JAKARTA PRESS THIS WEEK HAS HAD FIELD DAY REPORTING AND COMMENTING ON ACTION BY MINISTER OF STATE (FOR EFFICIENCY AND CONTROL OF STATE APPARATUS) J B SUMARLIN LEADING TO FIRING OF FIVE STATE TREASURY OFFICIALS. SUMARLIN POSED AS OFFICIAL OF A LOCAL HOSPITAL AND NEGOTIATED WITH TREASURY OFFICIAL CONCERNING AMOUNT OF "SPEED MONEY" REQUIRED IN PROCESSING PAY VOUCHERS FOR HOSPITAL'S NURSES. SUMARLIN ARRANGED FOR FINANCE MINISTER WARDHANA TO MAKE SPOT INSPECTION OF AFFECTED TREASURY OFFICE AT MOMENT OF FINAL PAYOFF, AND WARDHANA SUMMARILY FIRED THE FIVE OFFICIALS.

2. STORY OF EPISODE HAS RECEIVED WIDE COVERAGE AND UNIVERSAL ACCLAIM FROM JAKARTA PRESS. NEARLY EVERY MAJOR PAPER HAS CARRIED EDITORIALS DECRYING UNIVERSAL PRACTICE OF KICKBACKS AND CALLING FOR FURTHER, GENERALIZED MEASURES TO COUNTER SUCH CORRUPT ACTIVITIES. OTHER CABINET

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MINISTERS HAVE ISSUED CALLS FOR HONESTY IN GOVERNMENT AND

FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN REPORTING INCIDENTS OF DEMANDS FOR BRIBES OR KICKBACKS, AND INFORMATION MINISTER MASHURI, FOLLOWING ECONOMIC CABINET SESSION JULY 16, TOLD PRESS THAT PRESIDENT SUHARTO HAD ORDERED THAT ACTIONS AGAINST CORRUPT OFFICIAL BE CONTINUED. MASHURI NOTED THAT EXTRA-ORDINARY PRACTICE, BUT THAT GOVERNMENT IS STUDYING SYSTEMS FOR CONDUCTING REGULAR SUCH INVESTIGATIONS. SUMARLIN HAS PROMISED TO ANNOUNCE CONTINUING MEASURES NEXT WEEK.

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3. COMMENT: AS SEVERAL EDITORIALS HAVE IMPLIED, FACT THAT SUMARLIN HAD TO CONDUCT THIS INVESTIGATION PERSONALLY HIGHLIGHTS DIFFICULTIES GOI FACES IN INSTITUTING REGULAR SYSTEMS OF ANTI-CORRUPTION INVESTIGATIONS. DPR BUDGET COMMISSION MEMBER SUDARDJI POINTEDLY REMARKED IN PRESS INTERVIEW JULY 18 THAT CAMPAIGN CAN SUCCEED ONLY IF ACTION TAKEN AGAINST "BIG FISH" AS WELL AS LOW-LEVEL OFFICIALS. PREVIOUS ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGNS HAVE GENERALLY COME TO NOTHING, LARGELY BECAUSE OF PROBLEM OF HIGH-LEVEL OPPOSITION, AND MANY PREVIOUS CORRUPTION FIGHTERS THEMSELVES LOST THEIR JOBS. SUMARLIN CAMPAIGN (AND SUMARLIN) MAY WELL MEET SAME FATE, AND IT NOT EVEN CLEAR WHETHER CAMPAIGN IS SERIOUS EFFORT OR MERELY COSMETIC EXERCISE. NEVERTHELESS, SUMARLIN HAS AT LEAST GIVEN SOME NEW SPIRIT TO ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS, AND IS PRESUMABLY BOTH AWARE OF PITFALLS AND IN STRONGER POSITION THAN PREVIOUS LEADERS OF ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS TOPUSH PROGRAM AHEAD IF HE CHOSSES. BY ACTING IN CLASSIC INDONESIAN SHADOW PLAY TRADITION OF ENTERING "ENEMY CAMP" ALONE AND IN DISGUISE, SUMARLIN HAS IN ANY CASE CAPTURED PUBLIC IMAGINATION IN A WAY BOUND TO ADD TO HIS PERSONAL PRESTIGE AND FOLLOWING IN INDONESIA, COINCIDENTALLY IN THE SAME WEEK AS APPEARANCE OF TIME MAGAZINE LIST OF 150 FUTURE LEADERS IN WHICH SUMARLIN WAS ONE OF TWO INDONESIAN LEADERS INCLUDED.

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